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ABSTRACT

The Scopes trial of 1925 drew many reporters to Dayton, Tennessee, to report on what they expected would be the final blow to ignorant fundamentalism. They came with many preconceived notions about Dayton, the people of Dayton, William Jennings Bryan, and creationism. Close examination of pretrial, trial, and posttrial coverage in eight newspapers--the "New York Times," "New York American," "Chicago Tribune," "Washington Post," "Baltimore Sun," "Los Angeles Times," "Arkansas Gazette," and "Atlanta Constitution"--revealed that most reporters presupposed evolution as a scientific fact, the residents of Dayton as ignorant, and the Bible as highly errant. In reality, pro-evolution books were readily available in Dayton, while the key issue in the trial for Tennesseans was not free speech, but rather parental control over school curricula. The anti-evolution bill was seen as a way to forbid proselytizing for an as yet unproven evolutionary faith. The journalists covering the trial rarely tried to explain the complexity of the situation and the issue. The result was highly biased trial coverage that depicted Bryan as an inept prosecutor who saw himself as a type of Old Testament crusader. In general, the reporters who praised open-mindedness in their writing were themselves closed-minded when confronted with a world view opposed to their own. They incorrectly portrayed the evolution-creation debate as a battle between intelligence and stupidity and, as a result, the stereotypes they created persist today. (SRT)

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WHEN WORLD VIEWS COLLIDE: JOURNALISTS AND THE GREAT MONKEY TRIAL

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WHEN WORLD VIEWS COLLIDE:

JOURNALISTS AND THE GREAT MONKEY TRIAL

During the 1920s anthropologists from major universities as well as reporters from major newspapers journeyed to what were considered "primitive" cultures and came back to tell the tale. Margaret Mead, for instance, went from Harvard to Samoa, and in 1925 journalists from large cities of the east and midwest descended on Dayton, Tennessee, for the "monkey trial" of John T. Scopes.

Mead and the journalists each, in their own ways, produced cultural studies that still receive frequent quotation. Mead's Coming of Age in Samoa is still used in undergraduate anthropology courses.[1] The "monkey trial" still is referred to when questions arise about the teaching of evolution in schools or, more generally, the nature of Christian fundamentalism.

Margaret Mead, though, may have seen in Samoa not what was there, but what she expected to see. Derek Freeman, in his recent book Margaret Mead and Samoa, shows that Mead during her graduate studies had come to believe that native peoples unspoiled by civilization were naturally good.[2] They were supposedly free from the repression caused by Western culture with its remnants of Christianity, remnants Mead herself had discarded.

Coming of Age in Samoa described people with a healthy,

"unrepressed" sexuality. Mead's Samoans did not engage in rape and were without sexual or other disfunctions. Freeman, though, studied court records and showed that rape was a very serious Samoan problem at the same time Mead was on the island imagining paradise. Other supposed "diseases of civilization" were native to Samoa as well.

Freeman criticized Mead's methodology: She apparently did not know the language well and spent much of her time with local "guides" who told her what she expected to hear and showed her what she expected to see. But, more basically, Mead fell prey to what Walter Lippmann, also writing in the 1920s, called "the pictures in our head," the phenomena we want to see.[3] For Mead, presuppositions dictated findings.

The purpose of this article is to reassess the Scopes trial reportage as Freeman reassessed the work of Mead. When journalists such as H. L. Mencken, Bugs Baer, Russell Owen of the New York Times, W.O. McGeehan of the New York Herald Tribune, and Philip Kinsley of the Chicago Tribune, went to Dayton, they were thrown into a small town, fundamentalist culture very different than their own urban, modernist environment. Mencken wrote that he "expected to find a squalid Southern village, with darkies snoozing on the horseblocks, pigs rooting under the houses and the inhabitants full of hookworm and malaria."[4] Other reporters came with expectations of Darwinian books burning and stray atheists being tossed on the fire also.

As we will see, the reality of Dayton was very different from the pictures reporters had in their heads. The key question this article attempts to answer is: When they saw

something different, did Scopes trial reporters generally change their views, or did they stick to preconceived notions? The methodology for this article is easily explicable: Reading, reading, comparing and contrasting. How did trial newspaper reports compare with trial records? How did reports from those who came to the culture like anthropologists from afar compare with those from observers more familiar with local mores? How did non-journalistic observers remember the events? Could any generalizable lessons be learned?

A close reading of daily June and July, 1925, pre-trial, trial, and post-trial coverage in eight newspapers -- The New York Times, New York American, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post, Baltimore Sun, Los Angeles Times, Arkansas Gazette, Atlanta Constitution -- proved essential. Since most of the newspapers used wire service correspondents as well as their own writers, it was possible to examine what readers not only of those newspapers but hundreds of others throughout the United States were learning about the trial.

Presuppositions

By the 1920s the theory of evolution was accepted as scientific fact at most universities. It also provided new hope for those who no longer accepted biblical Christianity. As the New York Times editorialized, modern man needed "faith, even of a grain of mustard seed, in the evolution of life..."[5] The Times quoted Bernard Shaw's statement that "The world without the conception of evolution would be a world wherein men of strong

mind could only despair" -- for their only hope would be in a God to whom such modernists would not pray.[6]

Other newspapers featured more spokesmen for evolutionary beliefs. The Chicago Tribune gave front page space to zoologist H. J. Muller's faith concerning man that "so far he has had only a short probationary period. He is just at the beginning of a great epic adventure in the course of world evolution."[7] Belief in evolution had been growing ever since Darwin had reinvigorated the age-old concept through his mid-19th century writings, but World War I had given it new impetus. The great and terrible war had so decimated the hopes for peaceful progress of mankind as it was, that millions came to believe in one or the other of two ways upward from misery: either God's grace or man's evolution.

For the New York Times, the hope was in evolution. An editorial stated:

> If man has evolved, it is inconceivable that the process should stop and leave him in his present imperfect state. Specific creation has no such promise for man...No Legislation should (or can) rob the people of their hope...8

But in Tennessee, legislation that threatened to "rob the people of their hope" was passed, and the Times feared that it might spread throughout the United States.

Tennessee legislators, trying to stop usage of and teacher reliance on pro-evolution textbooks, made it a misdemeanor for public school teachers to proclaim as truth the belief "that man has descended from a lower order of animals."[9] The legislation made a clash of world views inevitable; the battle was joined when one young Dayton teacher, John T. Scopes, responded to an

American Civil Liberties Union plea for someone to agree to be the defendant in a test case, with the ACLU paying all legal expenses. Agnostic Clarence Darrow, probably the most famous lawyer of the era, was hired to head the defense; fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan, thrice-defeated Democratic presidential candidate and former Secretary of State, became point man for the prosecution.

The issue and the superstars brought out the journalists. Over 100 reporters were dispatched to the trial; they wired 165,000 words daily to their newspapers during the twelve days of extensive coverage in July, 1925. The New York Times itself received an average of 10,000 words per day from its writers on the scene.[10]

In theory, trial coverage was an opportunity to illuminate the theological debate that lay behind the evolution vs. creation issue. From books that were written on the issues of the case, from a few of the news reports, and from the trial transcript itself, we can see that there were intelligent people on both sides of the issue. For instance, even a pro-evolution journalist at one point admitted that the man who had proposed the anti-evolutionary legislation was "a sound logician."[11] Another reporter wrote with amazement of a Tennessee mountain man who had, along with his old clothes and unpolished boots, a scholar's knowledge of Greek and the ability to make careful comparisons of New Testament translations.[12]

In practice, though, reporters tended to follow the example of the brilliant Mencken, who attacked the Dayton creationists

(before he had set foot in the town) as "local primates ... yokels... morons... half-wits."[13] Mencken put aside his typical amusement with life to ride Paul Revere-like through the land with dire warnings about the trial:

> Let no one mistake it for comedy, farcical though it may be in all its details. It serves notice on the country that Neanderthal man is organizing in these forlorn backwaters of the land, led a by a fanatic, rid of sense and devoid of conscience.[14]

Mencken summarized his view of the debate's complexity by noting, "On the one side was bigotry, ignorance, hatred, superstition, every sort of blackness that the human mind is capable of. On the other side was sense."[15]

Other journalists from the Northeast and Midwest also saw the story as one of pro-evolution intelligence vs. anti-evolution stupidity. Nunnally Johnson, who covered the trial for the Brooklyn Eagle and then became a noted Hollywood screenwriter, remembered years later, "For the newspapermen it was a lark on a monstrous scale...Being admirably cultivated fellows, they were all of course evolutionists and looked down on the local fundamentalists."[16] Acid-tongued Westbrook Pegler, who covered the trial briefly, admired Mencken and imitated his coverage, but noted years later concerning the creationists:

> They were intelligent people, including a fair proportion of college graduates. Nevertheless, the whole Blue Ridge country was ridiculed on religious grounds by an enormous claque of supercilious big town reporters...[17]

Such ridicule was not a function of politics; it underlay the politics of both liberal and conservative newspapers. The liberal New York Times editorialized that the creationist position represented a "breakdown of the reasoning powers. It is

seeming evidence that the human mind can go into deliquescence without falling into stark lunacy..."[18] The conservative Chicago Tribune sneered at fundamentalists looking for "horns and forked tails and the cloven hoofs..."[19] Two weeks before the trial began, the Arkansas Gazette could note, "These days a newspapers that does not contain a barbed thrust aimed directly or otherwise at Tennessee is fully as difficult to find as a needle in a haystack...or more to the point, a link in the chain of evolution."[20]

Nor was coverage simply a reflection of modern civilization vs. country squalor. When Mencken first arrived in Dayton he was so taken back that he produced his only non-acidic description of Dayton, calling it:

> a country town full of charm and even beauty....The houses are surrounded by pretty gardens, with cool green lawns and stately trees. The two chief streets are paved from curb to curb. The stores carry good stocks and have a metropolitan air... the Evolutionists and the Anti-Evolutionists seem to be on the best of terms and it is hard in a group to distinguish one from the other.21

One reporter mentioned with surprise that a Dayton drug store had gleaming counters and packaged goods similar to those available on Fifth Avenue.[22]

Physical differences between Samoa and Harvard Square were evident to Mead and her readers; Dayton was not so obviously a world apart. Theologically, though, the evolutionist-fundamentalist battle was clear, and reporters descending on Dayton seemed amused by local mores but outraged by fundamentalist theology, in part because it was something their cultures had only recently "outgrown."

The New York Times, for instance, noted at one point:

> A certain unexpectedness in the behavior and talk of the Dayton people. The unexpectedness comes from the absence in these Dayton people of any notable dissimilarity from people elsewhere except in their belated clinging to a method of Scriptural interpretation that not long ago was more than common in both North and South...[23]

The Times writer in those two sentences understood that the fundamentalist beliefs were far from bizarre; in fact, it was the newer method of Scriptural interpretation that had been regarded as bizarre in Times Square as well as Tennessee only a short time before.

Presuppositions and Errors in Description

When journalists actually arrived in Dayton and began daily reportage, their first job would be to describe accurately the legal issues of the trial. That was more difficult than it sounds, because some correspondents presented the trial as one involving free speech. For instance, the Chicago Tribune's Kinsley wrote that the Tennessee law, if upheld, would make every work on evolution "a book of evil tidings, to be studied in secret..."[24]

This was nonsense: Hundreds of pro-evolution writings were on sale in Dayton. Even a drug store had a stack of materials representing all positions. John Butler, the legislator who introduced the anti-evolution bill, had a copy of Darwin's The Origin of Species for his teenage children to read, and told reporters, "I am not opposed to teaching of evolution, but I don't think it ought to be taught in state-supported schools."[25]

The key issue was, clearly, not free speech, but parental control over school curricula. Even in Tennessee, Christian parents were already beginning to sense that their beliefs were being excluded from schools they were funding. William Jennings Bryan spoke for them when he said he "never advocated teaching the Bible in public schools," but believed:

> There is no reason why school children should not hear of Bible characters as well as other characters. In other words, there is no reason why the reading of the Bible should be excluded while the reading of books about other characters in history, like Confucius, should be permitted.[26]

Tennessee legislators saw their anti-evolution bill not as a way of putting Christian religion into the schools, but of forbidding proselytization for what they they saw as a trendy but unproven evolutionary faith. Tennessee Governor Peay, for instance, opposed the uncritical acceptance of evolutionary material "that no science has established..."[27] One anti-evolutionary organization called itself the Defenders of True Science versus Speculation, contending that evolution "is a theory not yet approved by science," particularly since species-transitional fossils ("missing links") had not been found.[28] "Demonstrated truth," Bryan insisted, "has no terrors for Christianity."[29]

It would have been difficult but not impossible for journalists to explain these issues, had they the ability to go beyond the pictures in their own heads, or the willingness to do so. But, with rare exceptions, they did not. A typical New York American lead on early trial coverage was, "Tennessee today maintained its quarantine against learning."[30] The battle was

"rock-ribbed Tennessee" vs. "unfettered investigation by the human mind and the liberty of opinion of which the Constitution makers preached."[31] Reporters from the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune regularly attacked Christian faith and "this superheated religious atmosphere, this pathetic search for the 'eternal truth.'"[32]

Columnists such as Bugs Baer thought they had great material to work with. Scopes was depicted as an imprisoned martyr,"the witch who is to be burned by Dayton."[33] (Actually, Scopes did not spend a second in jail and was regularly invited to dinner by Dayton Christians.) Bryan's face "was a panorama of curdled egotism."[34] If the creationists were to win, "The dunce cap will be the crown of office, and the slopstick will be the sceptre of authority."[35] Residents of Dayton were "the treewise monkeys" who "see no logic, speak no logic and hear no logic."[36] When William Jennings Bryan Jr., an attorney, arrived for the trial, Baer wrote, "Junior is bound to be a chip off the old blockhead...Like father, like son, and we don't like either."[37]

The Dayton jurors, who following the trial gave thoughtful accounts of the proceedings, were described in one New York headline: "INTELLIGENCE OF MOST OF LOWEST GRADE." It seemed that:

> All twelve are Protestant churchgoers...Hickory-shirted, collarless, suspendered, tanned, raw-boned men are these...The grade of intelligence as revealed by the attitudes and words of the twelve indicates to this observer that at least nine of the Scopes jurors had never used a four-syllable word in their lives until the term 'evolution' was crowded into the local vocabulary.[38]

One prospective juror even had "a homemade hair cut and ears like

a loving cup."[39]

Newspapers ran humorous comments about Dayton similar to Polish, Aggie, or other jokes, but they often were taken seriously by the New York Times, which trumpeted of "CRANKS AND FREAKS" in a front page headline and worried about the belief in creationism by "thousands of unregulated or ill-balanced minds."[40] Falling prey to the zombie school of reporting, the Times noted of the Tennesseans entering the courthouse, "All were sober-faced, tight-lipped, expressionless."[41] The Chicago Tribune news service was often more subtle, commenting:

> At regular intervals loud, ringing tones from the courthouse steeple announce the hour to Dayton folk -- and announce it consistently 35 minutes ahead of central standard time. This little town, object of scorn to residents of great cities, is far from being backward in counting the hours.42

Presuppositions and Biased Trial Coverage

The typical major newspaper reporter's cartoon version of the Dayton issues wasted an opportunity to explain vital issues. Yet, since newspapers are event-oriented, and are only rarely philosophical discussion societies, asking newspaper to clarify theological questions might be too much to ask. At least, though, readers might expect accurate news coverage of the actual trial events.

The judicial proceedings themselves were not of great interest. The case was open-and-shut, deliberately designed for conviction on obvious law-breaking so that the decision could be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court for a ruling on the act's constitutionality. (Ironically, although Scopes was convicted,

as planned by the ACLU, and although the anti-evolution law itself was upheld by the Tennessee Supreme Court, the Tennessee Supreme Court also overturned the conviction on a technicality involving the imposition of a $100 fine without jury approval.) The importance of the Dayton trial, for both prosecution and defense, lay in the chance to debate the issues of the case.

Accurate coverage of the great debates, sadly, was not forthcoming. Comparison of news reports on the trial's two most dramatic confrontations with other descriptive information shows extreme bias.

The first of the great debates pitted Bryan against Darrow's associate Dudley Malone on July 16. The court transcript shows strong and intelligent orations by both sides. Bryan, within his presuppositions, made a sophisticated and coherent argument. He stressed the evolutionary theory's lack of scientific proof and emphasized its inability to answer questions about how how life began, how man began, how one species actually changes into another, and so on. He pointed out the irreconcilability of Darwinian doctrines of extra-species evolution with the Biblical account of creation, original sin, and the reasons for Christ's coming.

Bryan's was an argument that many contemporary scholars might reject, but within its presuppositions the text is logical. Malone stated the evolutionist position in a similarly cohesive way. On the face of the written record, both sides did well.

Of course, reading the written record of a speech is not the same as being there. Yet the favorable remarks of many

Daytonites indicates the impact of Bryan's speech at the time. Even the defendant himself, John T. Scopes, said that the speech:

> was well received by the audience....Every gesture and intonation of [Bryan's] voice blended so perfectly that it was almost like a symphony; and yet, the impression was that it was all extemporaneous. The longer he talked (a little more than an hour), the more complete was the control he had over the crowd.[43]

Remarks of that kind did not get into major newspapers. Instead, the typical report from the predisposed reporters tracked Mencken's gibe that Bryan's speech "was a grotesque performance and downright touching in its imbecility."[44] McGeehan of the New York Herald Tribune wrote that Bryan "was given the floor and after exactly one hour and ten minutes he was lying upon it horizontally -- in a figurative sense."[45] (McGeehan was regularly a sportswriter and did not often get to write about figurative self-knockouts.) McGeehan used his mind-reading talents to note that "The brethren and sisters in the rear of the courtroom looked sorrowful and disappointed," and he used his awareness of body language to point out that "Mr. Bryan sat in his corner in the attitude of the defeated gladiator."[46]

Bryan coverage by a variety of reporters was laden with sarcastic biblical allusions: "Unleash his thunder...make this jury the recording angels of a great victory for revealed religion...The sun seemed to stand still in the heavens, as for Joshua of old, and to burn with holy wrath against the invaders of this fair Eden of fundamentalism....Dayton began to read a new book of revelations today. The wrath of Bryan fell at last. With whips of scorn...he sought to drive science from the temples of God and failed."[47]

Malone's speech, however, was said to lead to imminent victory, not in the courtroom but in the hearts and minds of creationists, according to the Chicago Tribune's Kinsley:

> Dayton is awakening -- more especially the mass of the younger people who heard the great debate. It was evident that the leaven was working....there is on the streets and in the homes here tonight a new opinion, not universal but of formidable proportions. Bryan is great, but the truth is greater, and the truth as applied to man's origin was not locked in a book in the days of Moses.[48]

Kinsley provided no evidence of this evident awakening, but "news coverage" suggesting similar attacks on the book of Genesis became even more of a staple of reporting from Dayton as the trial wore on.

The second major confrontation came on the trial's last day, when Bryan and Darrow went at it in a debate bannered in newspapers across the country: "BRYAN AND DARROW IN BITTER RELIGIOUS CLASH."[49]

The trial transcript shows a presuppositional debate in which both sides enunciated their views with occasional wit and frequent bitterness. If the goal of the antagonists in the Tennessee July heat was to keep their cool, both slipped, but it was Darrow who showed extreme intolerance, losing his temper to talk about "fool religion" and call Christians "bigots and ignoramuses."[50]

Once again, the question needs to be asked: Was the oral actuality different than the written record? Not according to an anti-evolution writer on one Oklahoma paper who proclaimed, "Mr. Bryan came out more than victorious. He made a monkey out of the defense counsel and left them gasping."[51] That bias is to

be expected. More useful is a report from the generally neutral (on this issue) Los Angeles Times, which concluded that "Bryan emerges in a better light than his rival."[52] Also useful is a report from the pro-evolution (but attuned to local culture) Arkansas Gazette, which reported that Bryan:

> stood up before Darrow at times and defied him to do his worst...[He gave] a deeply emotional religious appeal that struck the hearts of many of those who sat in front of him...today's performance puts the defense of this case where Mr. Bryan has tried to maneuver it -- into the field of opposition to the Bible, among the scientific agnosticism that follows Darrow....
>
> [Bryan] set his face to the one goal -- the defense of revealed religion, as he and his followers believe it. They number millions and they will applaud him in this struggle. He will be a brave figure to them after today. He emerges as a hero.[53]

Once again, though, New York and Chicago-based reporters declared Bryan a humiliated loser. The New York Times called Bryan's testimony "an absurdly pathetic performance, with a famous American the chief creator and butt of a crowd's rude laughter."[54] The next day the Times was at it again, saying of Bryan that "It was a Black Monday for him when he exposed himself...It has long been known to many that he was only a voice calling from a poorly-furnished brain-room."[55] The Herald-Tribune's McGeehan wrote that Bryan was "losing his temper and becoming to all intents and purposes a mammal."[56]

We can also go to some observers from years later. Pro-evolutionist L. Sprague de Camp, after reading contemporary accounts by journalists and other observers, concluded that:

> The newspaper reporters may have depicted the speech as less effective than it was, because most of them were city men, hostile to the speaker. To them, the Great Commoner [Bryan] was the leader of organized ignorance,

> the modern Torquemada. They would not have liked his speech no matter how eloquent or stirring it was.[57]

Some predisposed reporters were so far off in their understanding of the other side's beliefs that their stories became ludicrous. For instance, one journalist wrote that "the humiliation of being called 'an ignoramus' and a 'fool and a Fundamentalist'...cut Bryan to the quick."[58] Bryan, though, knew and quoted two Biblical verses from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

> If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool' so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.[59]

Bryan was also proud of being a "fundamentalist," one who went back to basics and viewed the Bible as inerrant. To call Bryan a fool and a fundamentalist in one phrase was to offer him not a slap but a badge of honor.

Even after the trial ended and Scopes was found guilty, some reporters persisted in mindreading journalism. The Chicago Tribune news service stressed Scopes' "intangible victory ... [Tennesseans] have begun to think and talk freely."[60] But the Arkansas Gazette pointed out that Tennesseans already had thought and talked freely, and noted that:

> Darrow's agnosticism enabled Bryan and other lawyers for the prosecution to represent the whole proceedings an attack on religion and the Bible...the odium with which the prosecution invested the defense of Scopes will cling to it to the end...[61]

Overall, most major newspaper reporters produced so much unobservant coverage that it often seemed as if they were watching the pictures in their head and not even seeing the trial at all.[62] The ultimate in this came when one New York scribe,

under a headline "Scopes Is Seen As New Galileo At Inquisition," wrote that the:

> sultry courtroom in Dayton, during a pause in the argument, became hazy and there evolved from the mists of past ages a new scene. The Tennessee judge disappeared and I racked my brain to recognize the robed dignitary on the bench. Yes, it was the grand inquisitor, the head of the inquisition at Rome.
>
> Lawyers faded from view, all except the evangelical leader of the prosecution, Mr. Bryan, who was reversely incarnated as angry-eyed Pope Urban...I saw the Tennessee Fundamentalist public become a medieval mob thirsty for heretical blood....[It was] 1616. The great Galileo was on trial.63

Pictures in our heads: Margaret Mead on Samoa, journalists at Dayton. At least Margaret Mead went out into the field. Many journalists in Dayton, though, became notorious for spending as little time with the local people as possible. H. L. Mencken, according to Pegler, "did not live in the humid hell of Dayton. He had an airy suite on Lookout Mountain in Chattanooga, with a tub of ice and a fan blowing a cool breeze as he sat in his shorts after an hour or two a day in Dayton."[64] McGeehan did become friendly with a local doctor who, during those days of prohibition, could offer documents more precious than rubies: prescriptions for valid liquor.[65]

The desire of reporters to get away from the physical and spiritual heat of Dayton created particularly severe problems on the last day of the trial, which turned from pro forma wrap-up to sensation when Bryan and Darrow had their famous confrontation. Many reporters were off swimming or carousing, with the result that other reporters, after telegraphing their own stories, hastily rewrote parts and sent them to the missing reporters'

newspapers in order to cover their friends. Scopes himself was asked by several reporters to write parts of the new articles, so journalistic coverage of the trial concluded with a bizarre touch: the defendant reporting on his own case under someone else's byline.[66]

Conclusions and Speculations

Ironically, reporters who praised "open-mindedness" in their stories showed great closemindedness when confronted with a world view opposed in many ways to their own. This is not surprising, though. All of us, even great writers such as Margaret Mead or H. L. Mencken, are bound whenever we do our own human analysis by the presuppositions we have and the plausibility structures we have developed. Most reporters in Dayton, even when they tried to be fair (some had no such intention), could not help seeing one side as plausible and the other side as "nonsensical."[67]

The life and beliefs of one of the best of the Scopes trial reporter shows the pattern. Raymond Clapper, the United Press reporter who built a tremendous reputation as a Washington correspondent during the 1930s and 1940s before dying in a plane crash while covering the end of the war against Japan, went through several theological changes earlier in his life.[67]

Olive Clapper, his wife, provided in her autobiography a portrait of the journalist as a young Bible-believer in 1912:

> Even though I had known Ray for years, it was not until I was sixteen that I fell in love with him. I can actually pinpoint the evening when his great dark piercing eyes glowed at me as he led the Christian Endeavor meeting at the Presbyterian Church. He read the Bible lesson, announced the hymns we would sing, and opened the discussion.68

Four years later, as both were ready to graduate from the University of Kansas, beliefs had changed:

> We owed a lot all our lives to this great state-supported University. It gave us knowledge and confidence in our capacity to learn and to do....We were beginning to question the rigid beliefs of our parents and needed a more reasonable belief....We particularly enjoyed Dr. E.C.A. Smith of the Unitarian Church in Lawrence when he discussed evolution and religion.69

By 1923, when the Clappers' first child was born, they were firm in their new faith:

> We outlined and agreed upon certain fundamentals to be taught to our children. Chief among these was our attitude toward religion. We had long since discarded the orthodox teachings of our youth. We could not believe the Old Testament prophets, whose teachings no doubt fitted well the savage age in which they lived but suited our world no better than the Greek oracles. The story of Christ we thought was moving and beautiful but we could not accept the virgin birth or the resurrection.70

There was no surprise in 1925, therefore, when Ray Clapper told his editor that he just <u>had to</u> cover the Scopes trial; as Olive Clapper argued, Bryan would show the world that "the whole case of fundamentalism [was] ridiculous..." According to her autobiography:

> Not even chains could have kept Ray from covering that famous trial. In his story of July 17 near the end of the trial, Ray wrote, 'Fundamentalist justice has plugged up the ears of this Tennessee mountain jury.'...And so it was. Unbelievable as the trial was to intelligent people, it did have value because the end result was greater enlightenment of people on the subject of evolution...71

The Clapper story could be repeated many times. Overall, Scopes trial coverage provides an example of philosopher Cornelius Van Til's contention that all views are essentially religious, in that they are all based on certain convictions as

to the nature of the universe. Readers of every news story are receiving not only information but are being taught, subtly or explicitly, a particular world view, whether it is theistic, pantheistic, materialistic, or whatever. In Kantian terms, newspapers offer not only phenomena, but noumena; not only facts learned from study, but an infrastructure that gives meaning to those facts.[72]

A Van Tilian perspective on journalism does not mean that reporters are never able to sense that there is a different way of looking at things. Frank Kent, a perceptive Baltimore Sun correspondent, generally joined the hunt at Dayton with the other reporters, but one day he was given the poetic gift Robert Burns wrote of, to see ourselves as others see us. The headlines and lead on Kent's July 15 article (after a day on which a trial session was not held) were:

> DAYTON TO HAVE VARIED VIEW OF ALIEN CULTURE/ Impressions Made By Visitors Will Not Be Altogether Favorable ... A lot has been written since the trial began about what the outside world thinks of Dayton. Nothing has been written about what Dayton thinks of the outside world. It would be interesting to know.[73]

Then Kent described some incidents: "On one corner a traveling atheist spoke in a loud voice to a gaping crowd of the absurdity of the Bible," then came to a "horribly hysterical climax." Nearby, "a ribald, jeering crowd of photographers, journalists" and others were "scattering abroad a brand of profanity and a species of joke rather new to the natives." The journalistic mob soon moved:

> Someone tipped the gang off that the Holy Rollers were having another meeting two miles away. A score of cars jammed with visitors rushed to the grove. They

> drove almost into the meeting, turned the glare of their headlights on the pitiful little group ... laughed and joked until, abashed and afraid, the Holy Rollers abandoned their prayers and slunk off to their homes in the hills.74

Kent also told of:

> an out-of-town man who, with a number of others, is boarding in the Dayton home of a little bride and groom doing their level best to make everybody comfortable and feed them well. On the table for breakfast were bacon and eggs, fruit, hot biscuits, coffee. Said this man in a terrible tone to the little bride, who waits on the table: 'Have you no corn flakes?' Unhappily she replied: 'I am very sorry, sir, but we haven't any.' 'Hell!' said this metropolitan gentleman, and, pushing his chair over, he stalked from the room, slamming the door behind him with a bang."75

Yet, after showing such perception, the very next day, July 16, Kent was back watching the "pictures in his head." He heaped ridicule on the fundamentalists and wrote that:

> Bryan sits in his corner silent and watchful....You can shut your eyes and imagine him leading them [Daytonites] to burn the unbelievers at the stake. The words 'sacrilegious dogs' seem quivering on his lips.76

It seems that there was no escaping presuppositions for long.

The implications of a presupposition-stressing perspective are disquieting for "objective" reporters and for readers who expect to "get the facts" and then be able to decide for themselves. Margaret Mead's presuppositions apparently determined her findings, but the presentation of those findings has helped to convince many of her readers that her presuppositions are true. Many reporters of the 1920s incorrectly portrayed the evolution-creation debate as a battle between intelligence and stupidity. Those stereotypes are still with us.

If Van Til's views of presuppositionalism are correct, more

lectures about "objectivity" or even "fairness" will not yield more balance and variety in news coverage of controversial subjects. Instead, reporters need to be more conscious of world views, and editors need to stop presenting opinion as fact. Major media units may also need an informal program of affirmative action, or at least non-discrimination, in regard to reporters who have world views different from those Enlightenment variants prevalent in many newsrooms.

Notes

1. Margaret Mead, Coming of Age in Samoa (New York: W. Morrow and Company, 1928).

2. Derek Freeman, Margaret Mead and Samoa (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

3. Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), p. 21: "For the most part we do not see first, then define; we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped....That is why accounts of returning travellers are often an interesting tale of what the traveller carried abroad with him on his trip. If he carried chiefly his appetite, a zeal for tiled bathrooms, a conviction that the Pullman car is the acme of human comfort, and a belief that it is proper to tip waiters, taxicab drivers, and barbers, but under no circumstances station agents and ushers, then his Odyssey will be replete with good meals and bad meals, bathing adventures, compartment-train escapades, and voracious demands for money."

4. Baltimore Sun, July 9, 1925, p. 1.

5. New York Times, July 11, 1925, p. 10.

6. Ibid., July 11, 1925, p. 2.

7. Chicago Tribune, July 21, 1925, p. 1.

8. New York Times, July 26, 1925, Section II, p. 4.

9. Leslie H. Allen, ed., Bryan and Darrow at Dayton: The

Record and Documents of the "Bible-Evolution Trial" (New York: Russell & Russell, 1925), p. 1.

10. New York Times, July 22, 1925, p. 2.

11. Ibid., July 7, p. 18.

12. Ibid., July 19, 1925, Section VIII, p. 3.

13. L. Sprague de Camp, The Great Monkey Trial (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1968), p. 274.

14. Baltimore Sun, July 18, 1925, p. 1.

15. De Camp, p. 436. Mencken was echoing the intolerance of many anti-evolution spokesmen. For instance, Columbia University dean Henry H. Rusby demanded that universities not recognize degrees from universities that did not accept evolution. A leading liberal minister, Charles Francis Potter, argued that "educated and enlightened men ought not to rest until the possibility of such dense mental darkness is removed." The New York Times then editorialized against "the mental and moral infection which has been let loose upon the land..." (New York Times, July 12, 1925, section I, p. 2; Arkansas Gazette, June 16, p. 2.)

    Fundamentalists had some justification for believing that they were being told not "live and let live," but "your diseased religion does not deserve to exist."

16. New York World Telegram & Sun, July 9, 1956, p. 19.

17. New York Journal-American, September 11, 1960, p. 19.

18. New York Times, July 13, p. 16.

19. Chicago Tribune, July 19, 1925, p. 5.

20. Arkansas Gazette, July 7, 1925, p. 6.

21. Baltimore Sun, July 9, 1925, p. 1.

22. Atlanta Constitution, July 8, 1925, p. 4 : "Robinson's drug store, where the argument took place that started the trial, is a modern emporium with a palatial soda foundation. The same chain store drugs are displayed on the counter that you see in the drug store at Forty-second and Broadway."

23. New York Times, July 20, 1925, p. 14.

24. Arkansas Gazette, July 18, 1925, p. 5.

25. Baltimore Sun, July 10, 1925, p. 1. Also see Atlanta Constitution, July 9, p. 10.

26. Arkansas Gazette, July 12, p. 1. Also see Arkansas Gazette, June 23, p. 1, and June 28, p. 1; and Washington Post, July 16, 1925, p. 6.

27. Arkansas Gazette, June 27, 1925, p. 1.

28. Atlanta Constitution, July 2, 1925, p. 1.

29. Ibid., July 8, 1925, p. 22.

30. New York American, July 18, 1925, p. 1.

31. Ibid., July 14, p. 1.

32. Arkansas Gazette (New York Times/Chicago Tribune news service), July 16, 1925, p. 3. Not only fundamentalists saw such news coverage as an attack on Christianity generally. The Catholic Press Association telegrammed Bryan, "There is a vast amount of sympathy for Mr. Bryan and the State of Tennessee among the Catholics of America. A great many of us are highly indignant at the ribald abuse which has been heaped upon your splendid stand by the newspapers and non-religionists of certain sections." (Arkansas Gazette, July 10, 1925, p. 1)

33. New York American, July 13, 1925, p. 1.

34. Ibid., July 15, p. 4.

35. Ibid., July 16, p. 2.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., July 17, p. 2.

38. New York American, July 12, 1925, p. 1.

39. Ibid. See also Arkansas Gazette, July 11, p. 1

40. New York Times, July 11, 1925, p. 1; July 13, p. 16.

41. Ibid., July 11, p. 1.

42. Arkansas Gazette, July 9, 1925, p. 1.

43. Jerry R. Tompkins, ed., D-Days at Dayton: Reflections on the Scopes Trial (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 26.

44. Baltimore Sun, July 17, 1925, p. 1.

45. Los Angeles Times, July 17, 1925, Section I, p. 2.

46. Ibid.

47. Arkansas Gazette, July 12, 1925, p. 1; July 13, p. 1; July 17, p. 3

48. Chicago Tribune, See also Arkansas Gazette, July 14, p. 5

49. Atlanta Constitution, July 21, 1925, p. 1.

50. Washington Post, July 21, 1925, p. 2.

51. De Camp, pp. 435-6.

52. Los Angeles Times, July 23, 1925, Section II, p. 4.

53. Arkansas Gazette, July 21, 1925, p. 1.

54. New York Times, July 21, 1925, p. 2.

55. Ibid., July 22, 1925, p. 18.

56. Los Angeles Times, July 21, 1925, p. 1.

57. De Camp, p. 327.

58. Outlook, July 29, 1925, p. 443.

59. I Corinthians 3:18-19 (New International Version translation).

60. Arkansas Gazette, July 19, 1925, p. 5; see also New York Times, July 19, 1925, Section VIII, p. 3; Atlanta Constitution, July 22, p. 6.

61. Arkansas Gazette, July 23, 1925, p. 6.

62. Baltimore Sun, July 16, 1925, p. 1.

63. New York American, July 14, 1925, p. 1.

64. New York Journal-American, September 11, 1960, p. 5. Sadly, Mencken apparently did not use those quiet moments to think through the inconsistencies in his reportage. Instead, he was constantly double-thinking, as in this July 17, 1925, report: "I described Stewart the other day as a man of apparent education and sense...[Yet] he slid into a violent theological harangue, full of extravagant nonsense." Logically, a person of sense can talk nonsense only if he is schizophrenic, or if nonsense might be sensible; Mencken appeared unwilling to consider the latter proposition, for he complained on July 18, "The chief prosecuting attorney, beginning like a competent lawyer and a man of self-respect, ended like a convert at a Billy Sunday revival."

65. Ibid.

66. John T. Scopes and James Presley, Center of the Storm: Memoirs of John T. Scopes (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 183.

67. Reporters, in turn, would help to shape the plausibility structures of newspaper readers. The Atlanta Constitution editorialized about the trial coverage's potential effect: "Thousands of columns of newspaper debate have been published under Dayton date lines in the past two weeks, and from it all the cause of the religion of Jesus Christ has not been helped, but the world has been broadcast with the seeds of doubt and skepticism, and only the future can tell what the harvest will be...among the millions of people who congest the bumper ground between science and the Bible there may be thousands who will now find themselves drifting into the easy-going channels of agnosticism." (July 22, 1925, p. 6)

Nevertheless, when Clarence Darrow revisited Dayton a few years after the trial, he saw a newly-built church (Cumberland Presbyterian) and commented, "I guess I didn't do much good after all."

68. Olive Clapper, One Lucky Woman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), p. 34.

69. Ibid., p. 51.

70. Ibid., p. 109.

71. Ibid., p. 99.

72. For an excellent discussion of presuppositionalism, see Cornelius Van Til, The Defense of the Faith (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1955).

73. Baltimore Sun, July 15, 1925, p. 1.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., July 16, 1925, p. 1.